

2018-02-09

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/10582>

10.1080/09575146.2018.1434487

Early Years

Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

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Found in translation: an analytical framework to explore national and regional Early Childhood Education and Care systems

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Abstract

This article explores the German discourse of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as it has emerged and changed over time. The conceptual elements of the triad of care, child raising and education (*Betreuung, Erziehung und Bildung*) is described and illustrated by salient points in the development of German ECEC services. Indicators for each of these concepts are discussed. I draw on German and English literature and my professional knowledge from training and working in West German ECEC services in the 1970s and 1980s in Baden-Württemberg and Hamburg. This analytical framework reveals the reciprocal influences of path dependency and of underlying assumptions about the relationship between the state, parents and children. Here I demonstrate how it renders visible details of the German system that are often lost in larger comparative studies. It provides a tool for policy makers, researchers and practitioners to compare ECEC systems and learn from other countries. It also serves as a warning against crude attempts of policy borrowing from other countries and can aid insights on why some of these attempts encounter difficulties.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education and Care, Germany, comparative research,

Introduction

Researchers, policy makers and practitioners in many countries continue to be interested in developing high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services. There is an increasing awareness of their potential social and economic contribution to young children

and their families, both in an immediate and long-term perspective. Supra-national organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union and their sub-organisations promote the investment in ECEC services to support children's development and acquisition of human capital. These large organisations are successful in influencing policy at the national and local level because they are perceived as authoritative actors, holding expert knowledge based on large international data sets (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2011; Rutkowski 2007). Their reports rank countries according to a number of indicators and their conclusions contain key elements of successful policy and areas for consideration by governments. This prepares the ground for policy diffusion through international policy networks (White 2011).

Despite attempts to develop common understandings of early learning and development (OECD 2015), comparative studies of ECEC systems continue to show a wide variety of services at nation state and (sometimes) local level and that there is not a single policy lever that can predict good outcomes for children (van Belle 2016). Reporting on averages, for example of access to services, staff:child ratios, qualifications and costs, is informative and useful. It aids the formulation of targets and allows links to other areas, like employment and family policies. However, a deeper understanding of particular forms of ECEC systems and their trajectories requires an analytical framework able to handle multiple aims, diverse stakeholders and service developments that are embedded in their historical roots (Cohen and Korintus 2016). I contend that this framework has to include the chronological development in order to pinpoint the path-dependency of services (Scheiwe and Willekens 2009) as they emerge in specific political, social and cultural contexts.

Comparative work is riddled with difficulties on how to translate terms, concepts and dominant discourses (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2015). Contemporary terms and discourses appear to represent ‘the truth’ and govern behaviour in a given time and place and exclude alternative interpretations or ways of being. These regimes of truth mediate concepts and classifications, aiding assessment on what is normal or abnormal, quite often tacitly.

Knowing about dominant discursive regimes expressed in one language also offers a chance to analyse powerful discourses developed in other languages. Every time a term becomes difficult to translate there is a chance to deconstruct these regimes of truth, by explaining and comparing meanings and silences inherent in each of the discourses. I will demonstrate the benefits of this kind of analysis for comparative work in the field of ECEC drawing on a set of concepts dominant in the German context.

The German Child and Youth Services Act (1990) sets out the task of ECEC as a triad of *Erziehung* [upbringing or raising], *Bildung* [education] and *Betreuung* [care] (§ 22 (3) SGB VIII). These interrelated concepts form the analytical framework of this article, as they are traced through the development of ECEC over time. Particular national and local ECEC systems are the outcome of how children, parents, adults, the state and institutions relate to each other. What constitutes good upbringing, care and education evolves over time in relation to social, cultural and political changes, new knowledge and personal experiences. In the next section I set out the reference points of the policy structure within which the German ECEC system has developed and provide a brief description of the current ECEC landscape in Germany, followed by the introduction of the concepts *Betreuung*, *Erziehung* and *Bildung*. I show how they highlight particular aspects of ECEC services and link them to German ECEC history. The discussion concentrates on indicators for the shifts in balance of the three interrelated concepts.

The German ECEC system: a brief overview

Germany is a federal state and since the reunification of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, a socialist country) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1990 consists of 16 *Länder* [governmental regions]. The Child and Youth Services Act (1990) pronounces a general right of parents to receive state support to raise, care for and educate their children and sets out the purpose of ECEC services including family day care. *Länder* and municipalities are obliged to interpret the Child and Youth Services Act 1990 and other acts, like the Federal Daycare Facility Expansion Act and the Childcare Funding Act 2008, by planning details and drawing up regional acts for implementation. The responsibility of *Länder* in combination with the subsidiarity principleⁱ encourages diversity and plurality of providers (Evers et al., 2005 in Oliver and Mätzke 2014). ECEC falls under the remit of the youth authorities/offices both at the *Länder*-level and the local, municipal level. Early Years settings are financed with a mixture of money from the *Land*, the municipality, the provider and parental fees (BMFSFJ 2013). Federal-level funding was provided for the first time in 2008 to support the sector in expanding places for one- and two-year old children (BMFSFJ 2012).

The modern historical context of two German states and the subsequent reunification contribute to this complexity (Hohmann 2015). On the one hand there is a clear continuum of approaches from Fröbel to social pedagogy in ECEC including normative expectations of traditional families. On the other hand the past establishment of Europe's most extensive system to enable parents to reconcile work and care in the former GDR (East Germany) continues to influence the discourse of family life and childhood, years after the collapse of the socialist system. The legacy of diversity established by the subsidiarity principle in a federal system can help to explain why the former East German *Länder* could maintain a better infrastructure in ECEC and are quicker to respond to the demand for increasing places

and why the expansion of childcare in the West German *Länder* is slower (Oliver and Mätzke 2014).

Since the 1990s, places and uptake have increased considerably. This was supported from 1996 by the legal entitlement to a place in ECEC from the child's third birthday until the start of compulsory schooling and was extended in 2013 to one- and two-year olds. Places range from 4 to 10 hours a day depending on the needs of individual families. Parents may have to pay fees although some *Länder* abolished these fees or implemented further financial subsidy of places. Municipalities responsible for provision, administration and some funding were not always able to meet demand. In 2015, 32.9% of under-three-year old children accessed ECEC services including family day care (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016).

However, there are more 2-year olds than 1-year olds and more children in the East German than in the West German *Länder* attending these settings. Nearly all 3- to 5-year old children in Germany attend ECEC services: about 90 percent of 3-year olds and 98 per cent of 5-year olds are enrolled. Thus Germany is just about to meet the Barcelona 2002 targets of providing places for 33 per cent of children under the age of three and exceeds the target of 90 per cent of 3-6 year olds attending ECEC settings. Around 56 per cent of under-3 year old children and 48 per cent of 3-6 year old children occupy full-time places (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017).

The development of the ECEC sector reflects and influences other demographic developments, like the recovery of the total fertility rate to 1.5, though still lower than the European average (Eurostat 2017) and employment rates of mothers (see Schreyer and Oberhuemer 2017).

Betreuung

Betreuung is what humans require if they cannot care for themselves. The term encompasses physical and emotional care as well as protection from any kind of harm (Textor 1999).

Parents have the duty and right to provide this type of care for their children. When they are not able to do so by themselves they have to ensure that care is provided by others, for example family members, friends, childminders or ECEC institutions. The state supports parents with financial benefits for families, establishing rights for employed parents, and setting up structures for the ECEC system including requirements for the qualification of practitioners and financial subsidy of these services.

The first institutions for children emerged at the beginning of the 19th Century in Germany in the context of industrialisation and were known as *Kleinkinderbewahranstalten* [literally: infant shelter institutions – the equivalent of ragged schools]. For example, Johann Georg Wirth (1807-1851) aimed to keep poor working class children off the streets and to protect them from accidents or slipping into criminality. In contrast to these institutions, Fröbel's kindergarten, established in 1840, emphasised *Erziehung* and *Bildung* (see below). Between 1850 and 1914 the proportion of children attending any of these early years institutions increased from 1 to 13 per cent, albeit with considerable regional differences (Erning 1987). Thereafter the availability of places stagnated despite the social policies of the Weimar Republic (Konrad 2012). During the Second World War a significantly increased number of childcare places enabled mothers to work (Thiersch 2001) and were often free of charge (Hagemann 2006).

After 1945, childcare provision in the two emerging German states had different historical trajectories. Both states had to find ways to distance themselves from the family and childcare policies of Nazism. West Germany picked up family ideals (mothers at home and fathers working to provide for the family) from before 1933, the onset of fascism, whilst the

socialist East Germany aimed to break with these older German discourses. The young socialist state invested heavily in full-time childcare, free to parents apart from a small fee towards meals. Childcare facilities for children from the age of three became part of the education system. Care for younger children was the responsibility of the health ministry (Boeckmann 1993). Clear frameworks and guidance for the work with children were developed centrally as well as training courses for staff in each type of setting (Launer 1983). By 1990, just before the reunification of Germany, there were places for 95 per cent of the 3-6 year old children and for 80 per cent of children under the age of three in East Germany (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990). Motherhood and fatherhood did not exclude adults from paid employment, reconciling these two roles was expected: using full-time daycare services was not accompanied by feelings of guilt towards children and most parents appreciated the contribution childcare settings made to the care and education of their children (Winkel, Kerkhoff, and Machalowski 1995).

West Germany strove to distance itself from the 'new' policies made in the GDR (Bast and Ostner 1992). Its welfare policy relied on ideals of the traditional male breadwinner family. From this perspective there was no need for full-time childcare, since maternal care was seen as the best environment for young children. Attending childcare settings was perceived to be harmful to children below the age of three as was full-time care for older children. Working mothers relied on childcare by grandmothers or family day care providers.

Concerns about declining fertility rates (especially in the Eastern parts of the newly reunified Germany), increased life expectancy and commitment to equal opportunities provided one important argument for the extension of ECEC services. Discourses of the good life in the reunified Germany include traditional gendered family roles as well as more emancipatory ideals of the reconciliation of work and care (Bien 1996). Women in the western *Länder* became less willing to identify with the traditional role of housewife and mothers. In practical

terms, if one reason for the delay of motherhood was the difficulty of reconciling work and care then better full-time provision of childcare might be the solution.

Erziehung

Erziehung has been translated as ‘upbringing’ and/or ‘child raising’ and brings into focus questions of enculturation and socialisation, enabling children to develop into free and autonomous adults, able and inclined to participate fully in cultural, social and political life.

This process should be regarded as complete when adulthood is reached. *Erziehung* is a social act in which child and adult meet in a hierarchical relationship. The adult is supposed to influence behaviour and personal dispositions, leading to improvement in the unknown future (Brezinka [1978] in Koller 2012). The focus is on social behaviour and the development and sharing of values and norms, the establishment of moral behaviour and acceptance of social rules. Successful *Erziehung* allows adults to question rules and norms but also to evaluate whether rules and expressed values are reasonable, true and are making sense.

Erziehung is a core task for families and ECEC institutions, where emotions of belonging to a place and to people, respect for others and general enjoyment of communal life can be fostered (Textor 1999). In group settings, children spend time with unrelated adults who nurture their social, emotional and cognitive skills on the journey to autonomous adulthood. Children and adults negotiate and develop relationships which are not available at home. Practices rooted in social pedagogy are particularly useful for work with young children, as they acknowledge and make use of children’s everyday experience in their families and local communities.

More detailed definitions of *Erziehung* shift and change over time, hand in hand with ideals of childhood, ideas of citizenship and questions about what constitutes freedom, self-

determination and community. A closer look at the earliest institutions for young children shows a different set of priorities regarding *Erziehung* in comparison with contemporary ECEC settings. About three quarters of the institutions for children at the beginning of the 19th century in Germany were set up by church-affiliated, charitable associations. They were full-time nurseries supervising children of working mothers, often free of charge. It was not unusual that one adult was responsible for 100 children (Konrad 2012). In addition to the protection of children from the worst effects of poverty and to appease working class parents, these institutions were designed to integrate children into the value system of the Christian community, but also to raise compliant members of the working class. Religious instruction was combined with the aim to instil obedience, diligence, cleanliness and punctuality (Erning 1987).

The institution founded by Fröbel in Bad Blankenburg which he called *Kindergarten* in 1840 offered an environment conducive for a different kind of *Erziehung*. He distanced himself from targeting unsupervised or neglected children and offered part-time places with a fee.

The kindergarten complemented families in their task of raising children in contrast to replacing parental care (Hagemann 2006). Fröbel's work was based on the assumption that children are active beings requiring a stimulating environment in which they are protected to develop. The kindergarten offered a structure of free and adult supported play, singing and movement games and tending the garden. This family orientated setting worked on the basis of relationships with children and adults from the local community, and themes for the daily activity were drawn from the local life world (Heiland 2010). Fröbel also trained (usually) mothers to become *Kindergärtnerinnen* [literally: children's gardeners (female form)].

Under Hitler and fascism (1933-1945), attempts to subsume all kindergartens under the control of the National Socialist national welfare were not entirely successful. Churches were able to maintain responsibility for kindergartens and accommodated practices aligned to

ideals of fascism (Berger 1986). Training became regulated centrally; Jewish and ‘undesirable’ tutors and students had to leave or were persecuted. A national curriculum for *Kindergärtnerinnen* was drawn up and implemented to reflect the changed expectation of *Erziehung* in kindergartens. Now the emphasis was on developing in children an emotional bond to the *Führer*, militarism, a racist ideology promoting physical fitness and supporting boys and girls to identify with strongly gendered roles (Berger 1986).

In the aftermath of the Second World War and the division of Germany the fast expanding ECEC system in the socialist GDR worked towards aims like the holistic development of children, including their health (also in practical terms), language and thinking development and their relationship to the environment. ECEC settings were to support the developing socialist personalities, instil the love of work and working in a collective, as well as solidarity and finding one’s place within society (Grossmann 1974).

After 1945, West German ECEC settings aimed to complement parenting by offering features of *Erziehung* based on processes inherent in group work with children. However, establishing ECEC was not a policy priority. The family was seen as the most appropriate institution to raise children until they started school. Until the 1970s there were places for around a third of children aged 3 to 6, mostly part-time, and for less than one per cent for younger children.

Kindergartens were the responsibility of the Youth Office and, true to the subsidiarity principle, 80 per cent of the part-time places were provided by the two main churches (Tietze 1993).

An important impulse for change to *Erziehung* came from the 1968 student revolution and the *Kinderladen* movement. Student parents set up childcare provision, often in an empty shop (*Laden* – therefore the name literally translated ‘child shop’) as an answer to the lack of childcare provision and as an alternative to pedagogy practised in mostly church based settings. As one aspect of coming to terms with the German past of National Socialism young

people sought ways to immunize future generations against Fascism. They drew on critical theory developed in the Frankfurt School and Adorno's insights into the authoritarian character, psycho-analytical theory and Alexander S. Neill's anti-authoritarian education in Summerhill, England (Baader 2012). This anti-authoritarian *Erziehung* was and is not a homogeneous approach, though it opened up the debate on *Erziehung* in settings and families and led to the development of some child centred approaches that are now established elements of ECEC pedagogy (Konrad 2012).

The ideal of German ECEC settings carries a strong social pedagogy ethos that embeds working with people within a social space created by relationships. Children are seen as whole 'rich' persons, with body, mind and emotions, history and identity, and with a right to a good life in the present. The work with children is hands-on and relationships are built with the help of art and music and through everyday life activities in the community. One of the most important resources of a practitioner is her attitude and concept of childhood and young people, resulting in respect and acknowledgement of children's rights and trust (Eichstseller and Holthoff 2001). The work with groups of children and supporting positive relationships among children is the task of the practitioner. One sign of successful work is the dispensability of the pedagogue for children's engagement with the life world. The attitudes, mind-set and ethos are the 'tools' of the practitioner and she may use her personal life experience to enhance her work as long as it is for the benefit of the children. To practise in this way requires a theoretical understanding, self-knowledge and constant reflection. Ideally, her work is firmly embedded in the community (Boddy, Cameron, and Petrie 2006; Eichststeller and Holthoff 2011), for example, when communities have to cope with a steep rise in unemployment, when children arrive as refugees or particular expectations on gendered roles emerge, an engagement with these issues is part of the social pedagogical approach.

Demographic changes also provide arguments for the importance of ECEC services if taking a more traditional perspective on childhood and families. For children growing up as an only child ECEC settings offer valuable opportunities to play and learn together with other children, build friendships and learn how to resolve conflicts and they offer opportunities to meet other adults.

Bildung

Bildung is generally translated as education. However, the German term is broader than the Anglophone use. It encompasses language, cultural tools, knowledge in various fields as well as areas of art and music, enabling critical engagement with the help of these (Textor 1999). Children are able to learn from inner motivation but also require the adults around them to present a stock of knowledge to be acquired. The kindergarten has been seen as the ideal place for children to follow up their interests, for example, in daily activities in close communities. Until recently, the boundaries between ECEC and school were strong and there was an accepted understanding about what should be taught in schools and therefore does not belong in kindergartens (Reyer 2006). Teaching children reading, writing and mathematics is the domain of school education. Kindergarten and families would prepare children for school by having established how to hold a pen, basic self-care activities and being a member of a group of children.

Fröbel's kindergarten pedagogy, developed in the 19th Century is part of his understanding of *Bildung* [education]. The institutional structures he set up, including a school, education of parents and training the workforce positioned the kindergarten as the first rung of an educational system. Fröbel perceived children as active learners, though in need of guidance to move from the sensual to the abstract. Starting points are activities with others, free and guided play and the natural context like the village and the family home in which children

grow up. His pedagogical and educational ideas were welcomed by the middle classes of the 19th century and by those who did not want to send their children to institutions affiliated to the church. Kindergartens had a strong impact on the status of women. They freed them to pursue other public work and training as a *Kindergärtnerin* was one of the rare female professional opportunities at a time when elementary education was still firmly in the hands of male teachers (Allen 2000). Fröbel's promotion of the idea of well educated women working with children was revolutionary and aligned well with republican virtues and liberal democratic beliefs. In the wake of the failed German revolution of 1848, Fröbel kindergartens were prohibited between 1851 and 1860.

The Imperial Youth Welfare Act 1922 introduced the subsidiarity principle, which declared private providers (at the time primarily the Protestant and Catholic Churches) to be the main suppliers and only allowed and obliged municipalities to step in if private provision was insufficient. This organising principle is still in place as is the diversity of providers.

The Sputnik shock in the era of the Cold Warⁱⁱ provided an accelerator for developments in ECEC and the task of pre-school education in West Germany. Places for 3 to 6 year old children were increased (see Tietze 1993). By 1990 there were places for just under 70 per cent of children, but of those only 15 per cent offered full-time care. Places for younger children covered just fewer than two per cent of this population, although with a higher proportion of full-time provision.

The next push for promoting the educational role of ECEC was prompted by the first set of findings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 15 year old students (OECD 2001). The results were unexpectedly negative.

The reform of ECEC was seen as necessary to improve children's outcomes. All *Länder* began to formulate frameworks and guidance to promote quality, by exemplifying the duty of early childhood settings to provide care and education, working together with parents and

documenting learning processes. According to the federal ministry responsible for children and families the task was to extend the definition of *Bildung* in the sense of a comprehensive, continuous improvement of the individual's capacity to act with the aim of a self-determined life (BMFSFJ 2013, 50). This definition is not new, but the firm establishment of early childhood services as the provider of these learning opportunities is. Improving children's outcomes and increasing educational capabilities in citizens is in itself an aim as well as stated with an eye on the future workforce. The link to human capital theory, the claims of quality and highest return on educational investment indicate a move towards the neoliberal discourse conceptualising children as life-long *learning homo economicus* (Moss 2014).

Discussion

Although these three concepts cannot be excluded from the ECEC discourse, some concepts may dominate the discourse of a particular ECEC system and the case of Germany will be used to highlight some of these issues.

A focus on care is indicated by a discourse on the availability and accessibility of places. Children require care by others when their parents are not able to do so, when children are 'in need' or when parents are in paid employment. Then full-time places are necessary. When parents receive financial support to make up for the lack of income due to forgone employment opportunities in order to care for children, the demand for full-time ECEC places declines. This is particularly salient for single parent families, with less flexibility to share tasks like paid work and caring. Further influences on the demand for full-time places are dominant family ideologies, the ability to earn a 'breadwinners' income by one person to sustain a family and whether structures are in place to lessen negative effects on careers when taking out time to care for children.

The physical care of very young children has some commonalities with nursing. An indicator for the prominence of this aspect is that training for working with very young children in Germany was the focus of the training of *Kinderpflegerinnen* (similar to that of an English Nursery Nurse). The stronger emphasis of education in ECEC, including the very young, went hand in hand with establishing the training as *Sozialassistentin* (social assistant) or *Sozialpädagogische Assistentin* (social-pedagogic assistant) to replace that of *Kinderpflegerin*. They are recognised as support staff and are not in charge of the group of children.

The German youth authorities/offices at *Länder* and local level are obliged to develop and implement ECEC policies. This can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand it points to the emphasis on care and welfare in German ECEC services, since Youth Offices are also responsible for children in need and child protection. The subsidiarity principle requires on the one hand knowledge about the extent of demand arising for children in need and/or to help parents to work in order to alleviate poverty. On the other hand, it indicates the task of the *Erziehung* of children, linking to the support offered to all parents by the Youth Office as part of child and youth welfare.

Structures supporting the development of community emphasise the task of *Erziehung*. They include the promotion of age mixed groups to resemble community, traditionally from the age of three until they leave the setting for school. Recently the age range has been extended further. The wider age range offers a heterogeneous community that promotes learning from and looking after each other. It is most likely that a child belongs to one group in one particular room throughout their time in the ECEC setting (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016). Consistency in the group of children is designed to promote meaningful relationships. The same adults work every day with the same children. Children take up a full-time, extended part-time or a part-time place, which means they either attend

every day of the week more than seven hours, five to seven hours or less than five hours in their particular group. Parents cannot book individual sessions and rooms cannot be filled with as many children as registration allows. Many settings have core hours and children are expected to attend these. Shared meals, group games, art and music, circle time and celebrating seasons and holidays foster close and positive relationships. The opportunity to develop good relationships with other children and adults is one of the increasingly important contributions of ECEC services in raising the next generation, particularly in the light of smaller families and a growing socio-cultural diversity in Germany. However, full-time attendance in an ECEC setting is not necessary for this aspect of child-raising.

The emphasis on *Erziehung* in ECEC settings is expressed in the qualification of *Staatlich Anerkannte Erzieherin* (usually shortened to *Erzieherin*). This qualification equips trainees for work with all children and young people in all kinds of settings but not in schools as teachers. *Erzieherinnen* are the largest professional group working in ECEC settings, comprising 67 per cent of pedagogical, leading and administrative staff. Eleven per cent of the workforce are qualified *Kinderpflegerin*. Only five per cent of staff in this sector are men (Statistisches Bundesamt 2016).

The potential for educating young children before they start school receives attention when international comparative studies like PISA highlight the less favourable outcomes of school education. ECEC is then declared as the ‘first rung of the education system’, despite not being the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and receives the label elementary education. It is also notable that the term *Bildung* is used more frequently to define ECEC. The description *frühkindliche Erziehung* is replaced by *frühkindliche Bildung und Erziehung* in official documents like the regular report on children and young people in Germany (see BMFSFJ, 2013).

Policy development directly affecting the work in ECEC settings reflects the move towards a greater emphasis on education, with each of the 16 Länder developing curriculum guidance for ECEC services. To address educational demands emerging from the curriculum guidance against a backdrop of experiential learning some settings have moved towards an internal open door policy. Children do have their ‘home’ groups, but can choose to spend some time with other children in other rooms or are encouraged to take part in specific activities. Spaces in settings are organised according to topics, often resembling school subjects. There are, for example, science rooms, music corners, and literacy spaces. Adult-led learning activities are then likely to be offered to homogenous age groups and begin to mirror the organisational structures of school. The focus on education in ECEC, like *Erziehung*, does not require children’s full-time attendance.

With the emphasis on education in ECEC to prepare children better for their future school career came demands for a better educated workforce. New programmes at Bachelor and Masters level were developed and at least a proportion of ECEC staff was envisaged to hold a higher level qualification (Thole and Cloos 2006). Less than one per cent of the workforce in ECEC settings hold the qualification *Kindheitspädagogin* (Statistisches Bundesamt 2016). Now, about ten years after the first *Kindheitspädagoginnen* entered the labour market, finding work in ECEC settings that is different and better paid than those by *Erzieherinnen* remains problematic (Altermann et al. 2015). The call for shared education of the ECEC staff and primary school teachers (Diller and Rauschenbach 2006) has not materialised. Considering the differences in roots, purpose and ethos of ECEC and schools it is not surprising that the weakening of professional differences through the route of training and education did not take hold.

Conclusion

In this article I have shown what emerges when focusing on the concepts *Betreuung*, *Erziehung* and *Bildung* for defining the purpose of the German ECEC system. The powerful triad reveals a shift of balance between the three concepts and is accompanied by the transferral of responsibilities from family to state or NGOs and vice versa. Whether non-parental care is accepted and required is reflected in the infra-structure of ECEC and the accessibility of full-time places in suitable facilities. The social pedagogical aims of community building are also addressed by particular structures within ECEC settings and daily routines, allowing relationships to grow between children, and children and adults over a longer period of time. This approach to work aims to broaden children's experiences, especially of those children without siblings and with different cultural backgrounds. When this aspect is emphasised, the training and education of staff is distinct from that of primary school teachers. The strongest indicator for an emphasis on the educational task of ECEC is the formulation of curriculum guidance and an increase of the use of the terms 'education' and 'educational' when discussing any aspect of ECEC.

Following the development of the German ECEC system over time has shown that requirements always address all of the three concepts but with varying degrees of emphasis. This uneven and changing balance is reflected in demands for other services, training and education, new occupational roles and passing responsibilities for services to different ministries, redefining rights and responsibilities and the relationship between children, parents and the state. The framework of the concepts *Betreuung*, *Erziehung* and *Bildung* can potentially be applied to explore ECEC policy and implementation in other countries. These terms may not easily translate into other languages, due to different conceptual discourses. Yet, an engagement with these concepts in a thorough and comparative manner could reveal the historical roots of current discourse and allows us to deconstruct what is and is not

thinkable. It may highlight, why the term ‘educare’ feels clumsy (Moss 1992) and has not been adopted in the English speaking world beyond the 1990s. The analytical framework developed in this article also explores and explains occupational roles with unfamiliar labels: a *Staatlich Anerkannte Erzieherin* is not a teacher or an Early Years Practitioner. A German Kindergarten is not equivalent to the American kindergarten and the meaning of a part-time place and how this influences children’s experiences differs and has wider implications, too. The variety of ECEC systems and the existing path dependencies comprising observable physical, political and policy structures can be analysed by exploring the relation between national and local discourse located in the triad of concepts *Betreuung*, *Erziehung* and *Bildung*.

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- ⁱ The principle of subsidiarity proposes that interventions ought to take place at the lowest level possible. The family is the smallest unit of society. When an individual requires care or other forms of support, help should be provided by the family. If that is not possible they may call upon the local community or voluntary organisations. Only when these cannot provide the necessary assistance, the local government can be called upon. The principle of subsidiarity is supported by, in comparison to other countries, generous financial transfers to families.
- ⁱⁱ The Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite Sputnik 1 in 1957, leading to anxieties about the perceived technological gap between the Eastern and Western nations.